



San Diego City Attorney **CASEY GWINN**

NEWS RELEASE

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DRAG RACERS & SPECTATORS – DEADLY COMBINATION! *PROPOSED NEW CITY ORDINANCE ALLOWS FOR ARREST & PROSECUTION OF SPECTATORS AT ILLEGAL STREET RACES*

San Diego, CA: Drag racers and spectators are a deadly combination! Spectators fuel the sport merely by their presence. Illegal street racing claims lives, threatens public safety, and attracts criminal activity. A new powerful crime fighting tool, however, may soon make it unlawful for spectators to attend illegal street racing or be present where preparations are being made for such illegal activities. The force behind the "Spectator Ordinance" is San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn and San Diego Police Chief David Bejarano. They have the support of families who have lost their children to illegal street racing.

At a morning news conference today, the City Attorney and Police Chief announced their plans to present the "Spectator Ordinance" at this afternoon's Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee. "Drag racing takes the lives of racers and innocent bystanders," said City Attorney Gwinn. "We cannot tolerate even one death, let alone five deaths this year. Put simply, this ordinance will help us save lives."

As of January of this year, thirty-five percent of vehicle occupant fatalities on City of San Diego streets were speed contest related. "This ordinance really is the next step in our efforts to combat illegal street racing," said Police Chief Bejarano. "We are trying to educate parents, we're targeting businesses that support illegal drag racing, and we're encouraging legal drag racing, such as San Diego State's 'racelegal.com' program at Qualcomm Stadium."

The first illegal street racing death this year occurred on January 3rd in the 3400 block of Park Boulevard. There were two fatalities; the driver and the passenger. On April 18th in the 8000 block of Linda Vista Road one driver lost his life. Another driver and his passenger lost their lives on August 25th in the 11-thousand

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block of Sorrento Valley Road. In December 1998, the 30 year old son of Cathy and John Flores was killed in an illegal street racing crash. The Flores' have dedicated their lives to raising awareness among the racing community about the dangers of street racing. They say, "It is high risk to spectate, drive or be a passenger in a race car. The consequence is the same; your life is at risk. Illegal street race events are comprised of a street race and addressing each one will save lives. Our son was a passenger; if he were in a safer environment he might still be alive today."

The proposed "Spectator Ordinance" would amend the San Diego Municipal Code and make it a misdemeanor for spectators to be knowingly present at all illegal speed contests or illegal exhibitions of speed. Violators would be subject to arrest for a misdemeanor offense, punishable by up to six months in the county jail and a \$1,000 fine. "If you look at the statistics from our first tactical operation, " said Sgt. Greg Sloan of Drag-net, "it becomes obvious that spectators need to be an enforcement target. Last December, an illegal street racing event drew 200 cars and 600 spectators. Those people are at risk of serious injury or death."

In California, there are three other jurisdictions which have ordinances prohibiting spectators at illegal speed contests and exhibitions of speed: the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles and the City of Ontario. The proposed new ordinance will be discussed at today's Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee, 3:15 p.m., 202 C Street, 12th floor. Council member Jim Madaffer, who is working with the City Attorney on developing more legal racing venues in the City is a supporter of the ordinance as well. "This ordinance is an important tool that will ultimately save lives and property damage."

Lydia Necochea, Program Director of SDSU RaceLegal.com, supports the proposed "Spectator Ordinance." She says, "It is imperative that we continually find new and innovative ways that are specifically designed to deter this high risk behavior. The proposed "Spectator Ordinance" will substantially aid in this quest."

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